



County of Fairfax, Virginia

**Response to Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau
Request for Comment on Transition Process
For 700 MHz Public Safety Broadband Waiver Recipients
PS Docket No. 12-94**

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Final

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1. Introduction

Fairfax County is the largest jurisdiction by population in the Commonwealth of Virginia, with 1,037,605 citizens living within its 407 square miles. Public Safety (PS) services are provided by 7 local law enforcement agencies, the Fairfax County Fire Department and numerous state and federal agencies. Interoperable communications in this region is both challenging and critical. Fairfax County is part of the National Capital Region (NCR) which includes 19 other local jurisdictions that routinely rely on operational mutual aid which has made communications interoperability a reality. This interoperability will be further enhanced by the allocation of the public safety 700 MHz broadband spectrum. Now that the D block will be available to public safety, public agencies and first responders have the opportunity to seamlessly access a secure, reliable, interoperable, public safety grade, broadband wireless network, without risk of service interruption due to a lack of prioritization or network overload once implemented.

The County long identified public safety interoperable broadband services as a priority, and in fact approved earlier as part of a NCR-wide Waiver. On June 28, 2010 filed a waiver to continue efforts to deploy a network as quickly as possible in the 700 MHz public safety broadband spectrum.

In March 2012, the County also applied for a Special Temporary Authority (STA) to deploy a pilot 700 MHz Public Safety network, which is currently in pending status. The County's private fiber enterprise network is part of the county's overall communications infrastructure supporting the broadband, will meet the technical specifications the FCC has proposed and has been architected to easily integrate into a future interoperable public safety broadband network.

The County of Fairfax, Virginia is pleased to provide the following comments to the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau 'Request for Comments' on the transition process for 700 MHz Public Safety Broadband Waiver Recipients.

We look forward to working with the federal government through a strong partnership to implement the best possible network plan.

2. Fairfax County Comments

The County of Fairfax, Virginia believes that a smooth transition of authority from the FCC to FirstNet is critical to the goal of deploying 700 MHz Public Safety Networks across the nation. The FCC should continue to approve all pending waiver requests, and transfer authority of those licenses, as well as those of the approved waiver recipients to the FirstNet board once convened.

Fairfax County understands that the FirstNet board will have the authority to allow current as well as jurisdictions with pending waivers to continue to build out their networks. It is further

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understood that the FirstNet board may choose to reconfigure the nationwide network and that any 700 MHz PS network build-outs must be consistent with the approved interoperability standards.

The potential decision of the FCC to deny waiver jurisdictions the ability to continue to build-out 700 MHz PS networks would adversely affect the transition of authority to the FirstNet board. State and Local jurisdictions have worked diligently to secure funding, acquire resources, and form public/private partnerships to build networks, and any halt in current and future build-outs would be a detriment to the common goal of achieving nationwide interoperable network.

The FirstNet board would benefit exponentially from the data, information and lessons learned being generated from current efforts and future First Responder operational use, thus by allowing current and pending waiver jurisdictions to build-out their networks, this valuable information will enhance FirstNet in implementing its plan for a nationwide interoperable network. Early deployments and adoption will create real-time environments that will provide invaluable data which can be used to formulate the development of Governance, data sharing strategies, policies, requirements, and procedures. Waiver jurisdictions should work with FirstNet to ensure that they are fully maximizing all of the efforts and resources of the State and Local Jurisdictions. This would create a 'national test bed', from which real world data can be derived.

The current legislation includes \$7 billion for deployment, with \$2 billion available until funds can be generated from the auction of other spectrum. It would be prudent for the FirstNet board to leverage the existing grant funding which pending and current waiver recipients have already secured and dedicated to the build-out of a PS network in the 700 MHz spectrum.

This strategy would enable FirstNet to implement its network plan which would include the value of waiver and pending waiver jurisdictions' current and future funding commitments, resources, and relationships to the nationwide network plan. The possibility of not allowing current and pending waiver jurisdictions to continue build-outs in the 700 MHz spectrum would mean the potential loss of grant funding such as The Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program (BTOP), which some jurisdictions are currently using for deployments and more importantly job creation. These grant funds were specifically applied for, secured and approved by the National Telecommunication and Information Agency (NTIA) because of the respondents' ability to leverage existing infrastructure to build-out a Public Safety Network in the 700 MHz spectrum.

The FCC and the Public Safety Community have endorsed LTE as the interoperability standard, and required waiver jurisdictions to utilize this technology for any plan for future build outs. The current legislation specifies that all devices and equipment must contain commercial technology, and must be compliant with the 3GPP LTE standards. Commercial carriers in 700 MHz have already committed to using the LTE technology, a move that is critical to the goal of achieving interoperability across a nationwide network.

3. Conclusion

It is essential that citizens nationwide who are protected by the Public Safety community can feel secure in the knowledge that first responders will be able to immediately respond to emergencies, catastrophic or man-made events by using a dependable, reliable, and effective communications network, thus if current implementations by state and local public safety agencies continue, the goal for the nationwide network would be further along. If Public Safety is forced to wait until the FirstNet board is in a position to actually start deployment of the nationwide network plan, the safety and security of the public and the nation will continue to be at great risk for a longer time. The distinct need for a private broadband wireless network for Fairfax County, Virginia and for all interdependent jurisdictions contained therein is essential and fundamental. The three fundamental drivers that justify the public safety broadband network are to improve data throughput, and network availability and reliability, recognizing that in this fiscally constrained economy it is critical that any network capability be cost effective so that critical public services, first responders, transportation and other critical infrastructure providers have access a communications infrastructure that is appropriately available and isn't prohibitively costly.

The transition to a public safety grade LTE network is both timely and necessary. The primary goal for Fairfax County is a network that will break the cycle of the public safety sector being dependent on commercial communications providers that were and will continue to be built "Public Grade" and not "Public Safety Grade", and thereby continually dealing with service interruptions impacting the ability for units to respond to emergencies timely. The dedicated public safety network will enable Fairfax County to provide broadband communications services to over 99 percent of the County's population, to all critical infrastructure facilities and to all roads that extend into the remote areas to and from these critical infrastructure and high population center locations.

In closing, the County of Fairfax, Virginia appreciates the circumspection that the FCC and NTIA have brought to bear on this transition. Fairfax recognizes that any decision rendered with regard to this transition is made with the requisite understanding that the FirstNet board will be positioned for success. This successful transition can be assured if the FCC implements a scheduled transition of all 700 MHz License Authority to FirstNet. The en mass transition will enhance communications between the FCC and the board, enabling the latter to leverage all progress to date, lessons learned, and will ensure that the focus of knowledge transfer is consistent with FirstNet objectives. The information transmitted should include existing commitments, resources and partnerships that the State and Local jurisdictions have instituted. It should also contain information about investments that have been expended both in sunk costs and grant funds to reach a mutually beneficial goal that many state and local governments have collaboratively worked to achieve.

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The County of Fairfax, Virginia strives to continue to work with other waiver jurisdictions, pending waiver jurisdictions, the FCC, NTIA, FirstNet Board, and the Federal Government to achieve the goal of a fully interoperable 700 MHz Public Safety Nationwide Network.